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SUBJECT: USAID-GOSS PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. SUMMARY. On Monday, June 15, officials from USG and the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) held their first Partnership Conference. This conference brought together representatives from USAID and the State Department based in Juba, Khartoum and Washington, along with more than 30 GOSS Ministers, Commissioners, Undersecretaries and other representatives. The two parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to reinforce their partnership and to reconfirm the \$203 million in funding that is part of an overall Regional Assistance Grant Agreement (RAGA) signed between USAID and the GOSS in September 2008. END SUMMARY.

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A POSITIVE BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP STRENGTHENED  
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¶2. In an effort to strengthen the already-positive USG and GOSS relationships and programs, USAID organized a Partnership Conference with key GOSS government officials on June 15. The theme of the event was "Working Together Toward Sustaining Peace and Stability." The session was led by GOSS Minister of Regional Cooperation General Oyay Deng Ajak, the Acting Assistant Administrator of USAID's Africa Bureau, USAID's Mission Director for Sudan and the Acting U.S. Consul General Juba.

¶3. The MOU signed by the GOSS and USAID declared as a common goal working together to strengthen democracy, economic prosperity, and regional stability for southern Sudan. The MOU recognizes U.S. support for GOSS priority development sectors that expand employment and improve sustainable livelihoods; increase access to healthcare including HIV/AIDS and malaria treatment and prevention; expand access to education with a focus on gender equality; and further the rule of law and good governance while preparing for the national elections in 2010. The signing ceremony was covered extensively by local media.

¶4. Through the RAGA signed in September 2008, USAID has contributed more than \$203 million for development programs with the intention of helping the GOSS provide the tangible peace dividends promised to its citizens in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Additional funding may be added to this agreement from 2009 to 2012.

Over the past nine months, several sub-sector retreats have been held with GOSS Ministries and State Governments, focusing on democracy and governance, health, education, and on the Three Areas of Abyei, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile States.

¶5. Minister for Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng spoke about the opportunities and challenges related to the CPA, outlined the various implementation issues on which the NCP and SPLM have disagreed since 2005, and expressed his government's hope that the upcoming CPA Forum in Washington on June 23 will lead to positive progress. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Samson Kwaje clarified current objectives and goals and outlined GOSS priorities, including education, prosperity, democracy, safety and security, tolerance, freedom and peace.

¶6. USAID staff outlined USG commitments to Southern Sudan and highlighted current programs and accomplishments. The GOSS appreciated the information related to future plans in economic growth, education, health, democracy and governance, and police training and corrections facilities improvement (managed by State/INL), support to the Three Areas, and humanitarian assistance. It was emphasized that USAID's strategy and USG programs are directly aligned with the GOSS priority areas.

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A FRANK AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE USG AND GOSS  
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¶7. A substantial amount of time was devoted to questions and comments from the GOSS officials. Regarding economic growth issues, agricultural development is a top priority, with market access including road construction, farmer training, seed distribution, improved productivity highlighted. Concerning education, officials raised points on improving literacy, expanding teacher training, continuing construction of new schools, facilitating more school feeding programs, and assisting with "mother tongue" instruction. Several GOSS officials addressed democratic governance, given the urgency related to the upcoming national election, currently scheduled for February 2010, and the referendum on self-determination for southern Sudan, likely to take place in early 2011. GOSS official praised health activities, and the head of the HIV/AIDS Commission requested support for an AIDS Prevalence Survey.

The BRIDGE program -- which is a multi-sectoral activity concentrating on states along the North/South border, including Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Unity, Upper Nile and the Three Areas of Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile -- helps to improve the relationship between local government and war-weary communities.

GOSS officials were pleased to hear that humanitarian assistance is beginning to transition from relief to development programs.

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Several speakers applauded USAID efforts to build the capacity of the GOSS Ministries and public service delivery.

¶8. USAID officers highlighted their programs' approach to gender mainstreaming in its activities. This point was noted positively by the GOSS Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission. She added that while the majority of USAID staff in Juba is female, only herself and one other woman were present at the conference to help represent the GOSS.

¶9. The Acting Consul General reinforced the message that the GOSS needs to address corruption in a more diligent manner. In response, a GOSS official cautioned her colleagues that additional donor funds should not be provided directly to the GOSS before the latter puts proper financial and procurement systems in place to demonstrate fiscal discipline and effective management.

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NEXT STEPS  
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¶10. GOSS and USG officials agreed on the need for future meetings to update each other on progress being made across different sectors. The impressive attendance and high-level GOSS representation demonstrated an active interest in USG-funded programs and the genuine partnership between the two sides. Given that several participants from the conference will be attending the June 23 CPA Forum in Washington, this event was a positive reaffirmation of the USG's commitment to supporting the GOSS.

ASQUINO